

Israel warns of 'emergency' after detecting new virus strain

November 26 2021, by Joseph Krauss



A man who opposes coronavirus vaccine mandates wears a mask altered to make a statement, poses with a toy sheep and an outsized syringe as he rides a crowded train in Jerusalem ahead of Shabbat, Friday, Nov. 26, 2021. Israel's prime minister says it is "on the threshold of an emergency situation" after authorities detected the country's first case of a new coronavirus variant in a traveler who returned from Malawi. Credit: AP Photo/Maya Alleruzzo

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said on Friday that Israel is "on the threshold of an emergency situation" after authorities detected the country's first case of a new coronavirus variant and barred travel to and from most African countries.

The Health Ministry said it detected the new strain in a traveler who had returned from Malawi and was investigating two other suspected cases. The three individuals, who had all been vaccinated, were placed in isolation.

A new coronavirus variant has been detected in South Africa that scientists say is a concern because of its high number of mutations and rapid spread among young people in Gauteng, the country's most populous province.

At a Cabinet meeting convened Friday to discuss the new variant, Bennett said it is more contagious and spreads more rapidly than the delta variant. He said authorities were still gathering information on whether it evades vaccines or is deadlier.

"We are currently at the threshold of an emergency situation," he said. "I ask everyone to be prepared and to fully join in the work around the clock."

The government later said that all countries in sub-Saharan Africa would be considered "red countries" from which foreign nationals are barred from traveling to Israel. Israelis are prohibited from visiting those countries and those returning from them must undergo a period of isolation.



A man who opposes coronavirus vaccine mandates wears a mask altered to make a statement, while carrying a toy sheep and an outsized syringe as he rides a crowded train in Jerusalem ahead of Shabbat, Friday, Nov. 26, 2021. Israel's prime minister says it is "on the threshold of an emergency situation" after authorities detected the country's first case of a new coronavirus variant in a traveler who returned from Malawi. Credit: AP Photo/Maya Alleruzzo



People shop at the Mahane Yehuda market in Jerusalem ahead of Shabbat and the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah, Friday, Nov. 26, 2021. Israel's prime minister says it is "on the threshold of an emergency situation" after authorities detected the country's first case of a new coronavirus variant in a traveler who returned from Malawi. Credit: AP Photo/Maya Alleruzzo



A woman video chats with another woman at the Mahane Yehuda market in Jerusalem ahead of Shabbat and the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah, Friday, Nov. 26, 2021. Israel's prime minister says it is "on the threshold of an emergency situation" after authorities detected the country's first case of a new coronavirus variant in a traveler who returned from Malawi. Credit: AP Photo/Maya Alleruzzo



Girls ride the light rail in Jerusalem ahead of Shabbat, Friday, Nov. 26, 2021. Israel's prime minister says it is "on the threshold of an emergency situation" after authorities detected the country's first case of a new coronavirus variant in a traveler who returned from Malawi. Credit: AP Photo/Maya Alleruzzo



An ultra-Orthodox Jewish man shops for fruit and vegetables in the Mahane Yehuda market in Jerusalem ahead of Shabbat and the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah, Friday, Nov. 26, 2021. Israel's prime minister says it is "on the threshold of an emergency situation" after authorities detected the country's first case of a new coronavirus variant in a traveler who returned from Malawi. Credit: AP Photo/Maya Alleruzzo

The Israeli military will work to locate all individuals who have been to red countries within the past week and instruct them to go into isolation while testing is carried out, it said.

Israel launched one of the world's first and most successful vaccination campaigns late last year, and nearly half the population has received a booster shot. Israel recently expanded the campaign to include children

as young as 5.

But the country only recently managed to contain a wave of infections driven by the highly contagious delta variant.

Israel, with a population of more than 9 million, has reported at least 8,182 deaths since the start of the pandemic. It currently has more than 7,000 active cases, including 120 who are seriously ill, according to the Health Ministry.

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